

Joseph Gannon
February 23, 2017
DDS Cuts

Thank you to the co-chairs, Senator Osten, Senator Formica, and Representative Walker, and esteemed members of the Appropriations Committee.

My name is Joseph Gannon and I work for DDS in a public respite. I have worked for the Department of Developmental Services for over 30 years and in respite for more than 18 years. I am testifying today to urge the committee to reject the cuts that the Governor has proposed to DDS. I am also speaking in support of expanding respite services.

In my 18 plus years, I have seen the demand for respite services increase, while the opportunities for families to utilize respite and other services are decreasing. About 16 years ago, at the Putnam Respite, we would invite and serve as many as 16 guests per week (Thursday afternoon through Tuesday at noon.) Several years ago, that number was cut to 12 guests per week, then to six guests per week. This was not due to decreased interest, but rather to staffing/overtime constraints. About five years ago, the Putnam respite was moved to a smaller location in Storrs.

The Storrs respite has a six guest capacity. Due to staffing cuts and building layout, however, there are some weeks we can only accommodate three guests. The length of the visits has also been cut by one full day. Guests must leave respite no later than 10:00 AM Monday morning. It is also important to note that families requesting respite services are offered three or four visits per year. The number has

dropped to one or two, with some families losing respite services completely.

Many of the people who wish to utilize respite services have already experienced other service cuts and are now losing desperately needed respite services. For many families, respite has been a life changer. Respite, according to families I've talked with, has allowed them to keep their loved ones at home- knowing they would be able to get occasional breaks.

The Department talks about privatization of services but that's not what I, and the families I have talked with are seeing. What I am hearing about from families is service elimination. Once services are eliminated there is no guarantee that they will ever come back. The people who are eligible for DDS services and their families need a real plan and effort to save services. The cuts need to stop now. Respite services need to be expanded to serve more of the people who are eligible and their families.

Families are being asked to wait and told these things might get better. Many ladies and gentlemen and their families would love to have that luxury. The truth is, however, that many families are at this very moment wondering how they will make it through the next 2 months, 2 weeks, 2 days, 2 hours. Families need services now!

Thank you